

AD 200

THE ROMAN AND KUSHAN EMPIRES REACH THEIR GREATEST EXTENTS; DECLINE OF THE HAN EMPIRE

Between AD 25 and 75, the Kushans, an Iranian nomad people, created a vast empire in Central Asia and northern India. This empire was notable for its cosmopolitan culture, blending Indian, Persian, nomad and Graeco-Roman influences, a reflection of its role as a key middleman in east-west trade routes. The Kushan empire was, however, highly decentralized and by AD 200 its power was already in decline.

Superficially the other empires established before this point had scarcely changed, but in fact all had serious problems. The prestige of the Parthians, always regarded as outsiders by their Persian subjects, was collapsing after a series of defeats by Rome and the Kushans. Believing that the Roman empire was becoming over-extended, the emperor Hadrian (r. 117–38) had called a halt to Roman expansion and fortified the northern frontiers, which the increasingly well-organized German tribes were putting under ever greater pressure.

In China, the Han dynasty was losing power to the local warlords on which it had relied to suppress peasant rebellions in AD 184. The warlords were now fighting between themselves. Another significant development at this time was the rise of Funan and Champa, the first kingdoms in Southeast Asia, owing mainly to the stimulus of international trade.

In the 1st century AD Graeco-Roman mariners discovered how to exploit the monsoon winds to sail directly from Egypt to India and return in a single season. Trade between the Roman empire and India increased greatly as a result. To supply the Roman market, Indian mariners in their turn increased trade with Southeast Asia, taking with them not only goods but also Hindu and Buddhist culture.

Five Largest Cities 000s (approximate)

